2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

For many Haitians, the struggle to obtain a piece of ground and to hold onto it is the very heart of the struggle for existence. On Morne l'Hôpital in 1932 I knew a man who owned ten acres of gardens. He had it planted in bananas and plantains, yams, and cotton. He had two cows and a calf and a grove of mango trees and coconut palms. His house was clean, tidy, and by Haitian standards well furnished. Eighteen years later he had less than an acre of land, no trees, no cotton, and no cattle. His family had become impoverished. He had three grown children and virtually no land to leave to them except that on which the house stood. His troubles began with a lawsuit over his land title. He sold his cattle to raise money to pay his court expenses. He lost half of his land as a result of the lawsuit, most of it the part with the good trees. Later, he sold more land to raise "eating money," and then rented it from the new owner. He could not grow enough cash crops to pay the rent and was finally evicted. Today he has not enough ground left on which to grow food for himself and his wife the year round.

The diminution of adequate landholdings has resulted in the disappearances of many of the *lacours* (hamlets) that were a familiar sight a few decades ago. Young people traditionally built their houses near the family homesteads until there were five, six, or a dozen houses in a group. There was a natural family community which shared a common social life and the work of the fields. But as the population increased and the landholdings shrank, young people and old began to move away in search of new land, or work in the cities. Often where the lacour remains it is only as a settlement of landless house renters who work where they may for wages.

Economic refugees from rural areas seek wage work in the cities, returning to their original homes only on special festive days for family reunions. The men find employment as gardeners, servants, construction laborers, and stevedores. Some find work on the sugar and sisal plantations, others in craft industries making straw hats, baskets, shoes, chairs, and mahogany ware for export. The struggle in the big city of Port-au-Prince is for many of them worse than the poverty they left behind. There are the inevitable slums and the constant threat of hunger. It is in the big city that one hears most often the words *moin grand gout* (I am hungry), and least often the words *Bondieu bon* (God is good).

The land hunger increases, and the overflow of the mountain settlements continues to move cityward. In former years there was a trend toward emigration across the eastern border into the Dominican Republic, which has a population density roughly one third or one fourth that of Haiti. This trend was checked, temporarily at least, in 1937 by

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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and set apart on special plates in a separate room for them; in the afternoon the family eats the food. If the twins to whom homage is being offered are still alive, they must wear special clothes at the sacrifice.

"I believe in the careful cult of the dead . . ." Once more it is necessary to renew one's acquaintance with primitive and folk belief to grasp the Haitian attitude. Life is desirable, death is dreaded; both death and the dead are feared. In the actual world, any excursion from the comfortably familiar countryside of one's home leads to confusion and bewilderment. Except in the company of his fellows (on a religious pilgrimage to the waterfalls at Ville-Bonheur, for example), a Haitian almost never leaves his valley or mountainside and market town. Sophisticated people view the unknown with pleasurable excitement, for they have learned by experience that the unfamiliar is not necessarily frightful; it is quite the contrary with simple folk, whose meagre experience with the unfamiliar has been at least somewhat alarming.

Death is the ultimate unknown. The fearsomeness the imagination conceives to lie beyond death seems to exist in almost direct proportion to people's ignorance of the material world. The fear of ghosts is a commonplace among primitive folk, as among the uneducated in the "civilized" world. Where ghosts are considered powerful, one part of any comprehensive cult will certainly deal with the dead.

In Haitian Vodun the teachings of the Catholic Church have exerted more influence upon the cult of the dead than upon any other part of the religion. The preparation of the corpse for burial shows no traces of African practice; the watch (or wake) and wailing over the deceased is familiar; the funeral itself is conducted by a Catholic priest, with burial in consecrated ground. Thereafter, the continual efforts to secure the tranquil repose of the departed bear the earmarks of faithful Catholic practice; it is at this point, however, that the cult begins to assume distinctive features, for it is firmly believed that the dead exert tremendous power in the world of the living. This power comes from God—the Christian God. The case has been put succinctly by Sumner and Keller: "The relation between man and ghost resolves itself . . . into a relation of rights and duties, with all the rights on one side and all the duties on the other."[30] God gives

30. W. G. Sumner and A. G. Keller, *The Science of Society* (New Haven, 1927), II, 829.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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policy of encouraging trade with his friends and prohibiting it with his enemies—both arbitrarily. The variation of Pétion was a sort of mercantilism, with set high tariffs.

What Dessalines planned was in terms of Western statecraft so weird that white onlookers felt they were restrained in calling Dessalines a transplanted African tribal chieftain. So passionately intense was the fury of that general against all whites that he took every precaution he could devise to prevent face-to-face dealings between his Haitians and foreigners. By deceit, treachery, and ingenious cruelty he conducted a massacre which deserves comparison with that of Saint Bartholomew: this effectively rid the country of white residents. Since for a time Haiti would have to depend for economic survival upon trade with foreigners, Dessalines next conceived a project whereby the whole population would be gathered in the centre of the island, in the most protected valleys and the gorges of the highest mountains. In these fastnesses the people would never see a white but would work on the land, producing sugar and coffee and cotton for export without ever leaving their local habitations. On the seacoast would be established certain "counters" over which a few incorruptible Haitians, chosen by the Emperor himself, would sell local products and buy the necessary imported goods. Impregnable fortresses were to guard access to the interior,[a] which would be reached by new roads from the seacoast "counters." Every seaport was to be destroyed as soon as new towns could be built in the back country. Already when his death intervened Dessalines had moved his capital from the Cape (that is, Cap-Haïtien, formerly Cap Français) to the inland village of Marchand (in the department of the Artibonite; now renamed Dessalines), and his next plan was to transfer Port-au-Prince eight leagues inland to the plantation Dérance, among the mountains.

Dessalines has been thought absurd, childish, barbaric. But there is something poignant, even tragic, in this fiery determination of the black chieftain, bitter over the cruelties and indignity to which his people had been subject for decades, to use this alien island as best he could and preserve his people at any cost from such another domination.

Despite his scheme for ultimate isolation of the people, Dessalines kept everyone steadily at work by the forced-labor system instituted

a. See p. 247 and note 13. under Toussaint.